

Reflections on Power Relations and Reciprocity in the Field While Conducting Research with Indigenous Peoples

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Abstract

This chapter looks at how specific research methods are chosen when conducting research with Indigenous Peoples and how theoretical principles and approaches are manifested on the ground. The authors share their personal stories and reflect on their research practices based on their fieldwork experience with the North Sámi in Finland and Norway, and with the Khwe San in Namibia. The two Indigenous groups represent two markedly different contexts. However, the commonalities in the upholding of cultural traditions allow researchers to reflect on methodological choices on shared grounds. Two sets of principles for conducting research in an Indigenous context are discussed, while the authors reflect on two main topics in more details; power relations and reciprocity. This chapter argues that principles such as *methodological flexibility* and the researcher's *relationships* with the community members, cultural values and the research topic are vital elements of research carried out with Indigenous communities.

Keywords

fieldwork – methodological flexibility – participatory photography – language documentation – Khwe San – Sámi

1 Introduction

This chapter is written by two scholars representing different research fields and fieldwork experiences. Attila Paksi, a social scientist with a long experience of fieldwork among the Khwe San people in Namibia, and Ilona Kivinen, a linguist studying Sámi languages, with a relatively short fieldwork experience

among the Sámi people. Regardless of the differences, both scholars are outsiders to the researched communities, which tends to profoundly affect the reciprocity and power relations between the community members and the researchers.

Postcolonial Indigenous research approaches and methodologies are informed by a relational worldview (Chilisa 2012; Kovach 2009). Consequently, Indigenous research itself can also be perceived as a web of relationships between people who are sharing information with each other (Wilson 2001). Fieldwork as qualitative research is based on building and managing relationships between the researchers and community members (Brayboy & Deyhle 2000; Maiter et al. 2008; Smith 1999). These relationships are meant to be maintained throughout the entirety of the research (and beyond), including the topic selection based on community needs that creates the basis for giving back and reciprocity.

The development of reciprocal relationships also implies addressing power disparities that occur in a research setting (Maiter et al. 2008). Melber (2019) points out that being aware of power inequalities does not eliminate the risk of reproducing them. Therefore, a paradigm shift towards the plurality of experiences, practices, knowledge and theories are required. To accommodate this plurality in an Indigenous research setting, Kovach (2009) argues for applying methods such as storytelling, life history and unstructured interviews, while other researchers emphasize exercising methodological flexibility rather than exact methods. Despite contemporary postcolonial theoretical and methodological approaches, researchers still face many challenges when aiming at incorporating Indigenous practices and protocols into their research and trying to address power inequalities during their fieldwork.

The aim of this chapter is two-fold. First, we provide an insight into the specificities of conducting research with Indigenous peoples by outlining key principles and approaches when taking power relations, cultural contexts and Indigenous ways of knowing into account. Second, we explore methodological considerations through our own experiences doing research with the North Sámi and with the Khwe San people. We provide a self-reflective overview of alternative ways of knowledge production in the context of the two studied communities' cultural concepts. We discuss various forms of reciprocity and practices of giving back in our research settings, and how the different starting points may affect the trust between scholars and community members. The two markedly different case studies provide an ideal scenario to showcase common methodological choices that address power inequalities and build on reciprocal relationships to co-create knowledge and skills in a research setting.

2 Principles of Culturally Responsive Research Practices

Researchers are likely to belong to a cultural group from which most of the destabilizing influences on Indigenous cultures originated (Groh 2018). Legal, ethical and methodological considerations are imperative to counteract our influences. Several Indigenous groups formulated their own ethical guidelines for research. The Mi'kmaw people in Canada developed a set of principles to provide researchers with the manner and relationships necessary for a harmonious relationship with the community (Battiste 2008). The San people in Southern Africa formulated their code of research ethics, emphasizing the need to show respect, honesty, fairness and care (South African San Institute 2017). The Sámi people are still in discussions about developing Sámi ethical guidelines. Meanwhile, the world's only Sámi university, the Sámi University of Applied Sciences, follows the WINHEC¹ ethical guidelines for research (Linkola et al. 2016). Apart from following set ethical principles, the chosen field methods are also crucial in Indigenous research. One way to counteract our influences is to design and apply minimally invasive research techniques, starting with a thorough self-analysis on positionality, values and personal behaviour (Groh 2018; see also Chapter 9).

Verna (Pepeyla) Miller, a member of the Nlakapamux First Nation and past president of the International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE) reminded the researchers to examine the outside environment as well as the inner self:

When you arrive at your fieldwork to conduct research with Indigenous People, you should first listen, listen and listen more. And when you think, you have listened enough, then listen, listen and listen more. (Verna (Pepeyla) Miller at ISE Congress; Belém, Brazil, 2018)

Smith (1999) stated that research with Indigenous peoples should be respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful. Restoule (2008) during his work with Canadian Aboriginal people formulated the five Rs of research in an Indigenous research context: (1) respect, (2) reciprocity, (3) relevance, (4) responsibility and, (5) relationship. *Respect* refers to the need to recognise and respect Indigenous cultural norms, values, and a holistic worldview. *Reciprocity* means that research must be mutually beneficial to the researcher and the local communities while listening to participants voices and accommodating their needs and goals. The research topic and method should be *relevant* to the Indigenous community. The researcher has a *responsibility* to recognise and uphold Indigenous values, practices, and ways of knowing. *Relationships*

between the researcher and Indigenous community members, and between community and culture are the crucial bond between the previous four Rs. Restoule claimed that a researcher engaging with Indigenous communities must fundamentally understand these concepts.

Kovach (2009) argued that contemporary research with Indigenous Peoples must include a decolonizing agenda because of the persisting colonial influence on Indigenous representation and voice in research. Snow and colleagues (2016) outlined six principles to engage researchers in practices that privilege the voices and goals of Indigenous populations (Table 8.1).

The principles of Snow et al. overlap with Restoule's five Rs and provide theoretical and practical guidance to conduct research with Indigenous peoples. The sixth principle, *methodological flexibility*, highlights not only the need of

TABLE 8.1 Principles of research practices, as described by Snow et al. (2016)

Principle	Description
Indigenous identity development	Active renegotiation of one's cultural identity to accommodate the understanding of how colonization has influenced the personal identity of self and others
Indigenous paradigmatic lens	The usage of research approaches congruent with Indigenous values and research goals
Reflexivity and power-sharing	An interdependent process requiring focused attention to intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship dynamics before, during, and after the research process
Critical immersion	The employment of holistic cultural awareness of self and others by the full absorption into the research context through the lens of critical consciousness
Participation and accountability	The application of ethical research involving the empowerment of individuals and communities to engage in all aspects of the research process
Methodological flexibility	The usage of several alternative data collection, analysis and presentation techniques congruent with Indigenous ways

using alternative data collection methods but also the multi-layered relationship between the researcher and community members. The researcher's roles could vary between participant, facilitator or an advocate depending strongly on the methods deployed. Also, methodological flexibility plays a crucial role in academic discussions between non-Indigenous and Indigenous scholars.

3 Our Stories

Sharing “*my own story*” is a conscious act to state our positionality and reflect on our background and epistemological history. Positionality in a research setting means the self-understanding of the past and present identities each researcher brings into research relationships (Heaslip 2014). This reflection entails considering our family history, cultural values, academic backgrounds, and past personal experiences. Smith (1999) argues that researchers must go further than merely recognizing personal beliefs and assumptions. Snow and colleagues (2016) consider the researcher’s reflexivity to be an integral part of the entire research process, involving honesty, openness about values and biases, and commitment to giving back to participants. We aim to introduce ourselves to illustrate how we have arrived at our field of studies to do research with the North Sámi and Khwe San people, by sharing our own reflective stories.

3.1 *From Teaching Students to Learning from Indigenous Peoples*

My name is Attila Paksi. I was born and raised in Hungary, where I graduated with a master’s degree in education and worked as a high-school teacher for three years in Budapest. My teaching journey continued in Australia, where I became familiar with the challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families were facing in a modern school setting. During a visit to Vanuatu’s islands, I was exposed to further dissonance between the school system and the traditional *kastom* schools of the Ni-Vanuatu (see e.g. McCarter & Gavin 2011). At that time, I had limited knowledge concerning social or cultural issues of Indigenous peoples. However, my interest arose to study the relationship between the modern education system and Indigenous ways of knowing, which eventually led me to work with the Khwe San people in Namibia.

Field researchers typically arrive at the study area without much of an introduction and prior relationship with the local people (Van Maanen 2011). By the time I made my first visit to the Khwe communities, I was fortunate to know three Khwe San elders from an international conference held in 2014. Lengthy discussions on local livelihoods and their ways of knowing led to an invitation to visit their communities. In 2015 I took the elders up on their invitation and conducted a scoping field trip leading to a doctoral research study involving 15 months of fieldwork (three times five months) between 2016 and 2018.

I had arrived at the villages to conduct fieldwork with – what I believed at that time – an open mind. In the beginning, my openness constituted listening to people’s needs and identifying their main challenges. I quickly realised that my perceived openness was severely biased by my practical, solution-oriented mindset in wanting to solve local challenges. After a month of fieldwork,

I began to understand the message in Verna (Pepeyla) Miller's talk, and my adjustment to the local setting slowly started to take shape. The experience of living together with the Khwe people provided not only an opportunity to study an Indigenous group but also triggered continuous self-reflection on my positionality, power relations, knowledge systems and result-driven methodologies. The mindset shifts of a practising teacher to a collaborative research participant resulted not only in carefully selecting my research methods but also a more reciprocal relationship with the locals.

3.2 *A Linguist Searching for Her Place*

My name is Ilona Kivinen. To my father, the *North* is very important although he has never lived there. My grandmother, father's mother, was from that area but had fled the war to the south in the 1940s. She stayed there due to marriage. Now her childhood home is under the artificial lake of Lokka. My family's roots on my grandmother's side have been studied, and they go back to Sámi people in the nineteenth century. Samuli Paulaharju, in his book *Sompio*, writes of my relatives, among others.

I interviewed my father a few years ago, bringing up emotional feelings about Sáminess that surprised me. Other, similar identity interviews have shown similar reactions in people who realise their Sáminess for the first time.² His mother did not speak about the times in the North, only about relatives from time to time. This type of denial of roots has been studied, e.g. on Sea Sámi people (e.g. Toivanen 2020). To my father, the Lokka region is more important, although he has never lived there.

I spent my childhood summers in Lokka with my family and shared a strong sense of belonging to the North with my father. I went to study Finno-Ugric languages at the University of Helsinki and fell in love with the North Sámi language and specialised in Sámi language studies. I have worked in Sámi language technology projects together with Sámi people. I have also had an opportunity to teach at the Sámi allaskuvla (The Sámi University of Applied Sciences). As a result, I made connections and made friends with North Sámi people. When meeting new Sámi people, they ask me where I am from. I tend to answer that I am from the south, but my ancestors were originally from the North.

I see it as essential that a scholar learns the language of the studied community to interact and make friendships, thus building trust between the scholar and the community members. In addition, for minority language speakers, the "outsiders' interest" may raise the value of the language and provide motivation to continue using it and transmitting it to children (see Pasanen 2015, 53). Raising the value of the language is especially important because the Sámi, like many other Indigenous peoples, have been ashamed of speaking their mother

tongue for a long time, and many still carry that shame. However, I have also felt that some may not like an outsider who speaks Sámi, especially those who do not speak Sámi themselves, i.e. they have lost their ancestral language. I feel that I have regained my ancestral language. Although I do understand that for many I am still an outsider.

I often reflect on my place in Indigenous language research. I am not eager to differentiate between Indigenous and minority languages due to the vulnerable situation of both under the pressure of nationalism and ideas of monolingualism. However, it is critical to maintain and develop minority languages, as language is one of the essential building blocks of identity. My job as a linguist is to support the speech communities by producing more knowledge on the language for and with the speakers

4 Our Research Settings

Conducting field research is not merely the use of pre-set techniques but depends on a complex interaction between the research problem, the researcher and those who are being researched (Burgess 2002). Our fieldwork settings differ in several ways, but both of us had to find and carefully design and re-design the most suitable methods in our specific research setting.

4.1 *The Research Setting in Namibia – by Attila Paksi*

An approximately 4,000 Khwe San people live inside the Bwabwata National Park, Namibia. The Khwe are traditionally mobile hunter-gatherers but today are settled in villages. They rely mostly on the social welfare system, food aid and the income of a small number of wage labourers in the community (Paksi & Pyhälä 2018). The ban on hunting and restriction on gathering due to nature conservation policies altered local livelihoods. However, hopes of the Government are high in integrating the Khwe into the mainstream economy through modern schooling, agriculture and employment creation (Republic of Namibia 2017). Meanwhile, the school dropout rates are high (Dieckmann et al. 2014), farming yields are negligible (Heim & Pyhälä 2017), and development projects do not make a long-lasting contribution in the villages. The settlements do not have electricity and radio coverage. Small local shops sell mostly alcohol and basic food items, while families live in mud or grass houses scattered around a tarmac road, fetching water from a centrally located borehole and refer to their lives as mere survival.

Only a fraction of Khwe students complete Grade 10 at the local schools and a handful of Khwe students finish tertiary education. The ones who earned a

degree or a diploma stayed in larger townships and got employment. The ones who dropped out of school consider themselves as “*Grade 8 failures*” or “*Grade 10 failures*” and stayed in their villages knowing that they will probably never be formally employed.

I have conducted research with the people living in the Eastern part of Bwabwata National Park, where approximately 1,600 Khwe are settled in 8 villages. I have carried out my field trips with my wife, who has been studying food and nutrition security as part of her doctoral research, while I was focusing on the role of traditional knowledge (TK) in (1) education, (2) nature conservation and (3) development projects.

Widlok (1999), while working with the Hailom in the Mangetti area of Namibia, described his field research as stationary, living in one village for the course of the fieldwork. In contrast, we have decided with my partner to conduct a mobile field research, living in a tent and moving from one village to another by car. We have chosen to be mobile for practical reasons: to cover a larger geographical area; the flexibility to pack and move anytime; less time spent with daily travelling; to experience various village settings, and be present in the studied village’s daily life. Throughout our 15 months long fieldwork, we have lived in four different villages but visited all the eight settlements in the study area.

4.2 *The Research Setting in Sápmi – by Ilona Kivinen*

The Sámi people live in four different countries; Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia. The total Sámi population is at most 100,000 (Lehtola 2015b, 23). They speak nine different Sámi languages – all of them considered endangered – that are closely related to each other. But not every Sámi person speaks Sámi. The number of speakers varies from less than five to about 20,000.³ However, the absolute number of speakers tell very little about the vitality of the languages, and the transmission and proportion of speakers in the total population are considered more relevant (Pasanen 2015, 74). The significance of the language related to the Indigenous identity varies among the speakers of the different Sámi languages. Still, in most cases, it is an integral part of ethnic identity, and in the Sámi context, the language is a part of the definition of being a Sámi (Sameloven 1987; Saamelaiskäräjälaki 974/1995 §3). Living in the area of four states means variation in the rights of maintaining the Sámi language, culture, and livelihood. All states have different laws and regulations that hinder cross-country collaborations. The languages and dialects do not follow the national borders, but the majority languages have a strong effect on the Sámi languages, creating new borders in dialects.

Unlike the Khwe, the Sámi live a modern life. They live in houses, but many of them still use traditional livelihoods; reindeer herding, fishing and hunting. Most of the Sámi are working in modern professions,⁴ and many have moved to cities seeking better living standards. Also, the Sámi are required to move outside of Sápmi to be able to participate in the higher education system. Hence, the most prominent Sámi communities are in cities such as Roavvenjárga and Helsset. This movement of the Sámi coupled with the changes that occurred related to the traditional living areas (see Chapter 7) have meant that the languages are not spoken in uniform areas, but the speaking communities have become separated and mingled. This is consistent with Johanna Laakso's (2014, 74) notion that the language speakers no longer live in their traditional communities. However, the Sámi are willing to use their native languages also in urban surroundings, where all the related services are organised on a voluntary basis by Sámi organizations.

All Sámi languages are considered endangered, but many are being revitalised (see e.g. Aikio-Puoskari 2016). One success story of reviving the Sámi languages is their modernization to meet the needs of modern, literate society. This applies especially to North Sámi, but also to other Sámi languages. Modernization involves the expansion of the use of Sámi to new, written domains that are outside of the traditional places of language use, such as administration, education and literature. The Sámi people consider the wide usage and writing of the language crucial for language survival (S. Aikio 1987, 457). Unlike Indigenous literature, in which the Indigenous language is fragmented, Sámi literature is mostly written in one of the Sámi languages (Ahvenjärvi 2019). However, there are not enough opportunities for writing in Sámi, and Sámi speakers are not used to using their language in a literary form (Outakoski 2015).

Language technological tools, such as morphological analysers (Giellatekno) and spell checkers (Divvun) for Sámi languages have been developed for all who write in Sámi to support the literal use of the language. It is worthwhile mentioning that in the development of these tools, both Sámi and non-Sámi professionals and linguists participated. This means that there was no need to discuss how to bend the tools to match the needs of the language as the project participants already knew what was needed.

I have conducted my fieldwork with mostly rather well-educated people, namely Sámi-speaking students and teachers. I made field trips to Oulu University, to meet with students from the Finnish side of Sápmi, to Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino) in Norway with a Sámi majority population, to Eanodat (Enontekiö) in Finland, and to Soadegilli (Sodankylä) in eastern Finland, where one village, Vuohčču (Vuotso), belongs to the Sápmi. In these areas the livelihood

consists of reindeer herding and hunting, but in the centres of Guovdageaidnu and Eanodat people also work in modern professions, such as teachers and administrative workers. Of these municipalities, Guovdageaidnu is also seen as the centre of the Sápmi area.

5 The Applied Methods with the Khwe San and the Sámi

When conducting research with Indigenous peoples, there must be ethical, epistemological and methodological inclusion of Indigenous voice, understanding and practices (Kovach 2015). In many cases that implies using methods brought in from Indigenous cultures such as yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010), sharing circles or Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection (Lavallée 2009), while in other cases it involves the adjustment of long-established academic methods. Wilson (2001) argues that some methods are chosen rather than others because they fit comfortably within the Indigenous paradigm, like talking circles, storytelling and even Participatory Action Research (PAR).

5.1 *Studying the Khwe San's Traditional Knowledge – by Attila Paksi*

By listing and evaluating the methods applied in the field, two groups emerged (Table 8.2). The first set of methods are more informal, spontaneous and observational while the second set is more rigid, planned and data-driven. Nonetheless, they are closely related to each other and work in a complementary manner.

The applied field methods emerged gradually over time. During my frequent afternoon village walks, locals approached me casually and engaged in informal

TABLE 8.2 The applied field methods while working with the Khwe San people

Informal methods	Formal methods
Living with the locals	Free listing interviews
Participant observation	Ranking interviews
Village walks	Semi-structured interviews
Guided bush walks	School lesson observations
Informal discussions	Teacher questionnaires
School visits/teachings	Student essays
	Development project visits
	Participatory photography

discussions. These led to opportunities to accompany Khwe youth and elders on gathering trips to the forest or visiting their agricultural fields. These gathering trips provided a unique insight into the Khwe's traditional knowledge. In addition, by visiting local schools and talking to the teachers, the transmission methods of "modern school knowledge" could also be observed. The process and results of these observatory methods gradually led to more structured ones. Pressing topics emerged and contradictions surfaced through the informal discussions leading to the development of locally relevant free listing and ranking activities, interview guides and survey questionnaires. I have also observed the locals' interest and excitement about the books I was reading and holding in my hands. They were particularly curious about photos and illustrations. This prompted me to try out photo-elicitation during semi-structured interviews, which helped immensely in starting a directed conversation even with community members who had previously thought that they had nothing to contribute. Using photos helped to bridge emotional and epistemological barriers and eventually led to the application of a participatory photography method, which is further discussed in this article.

5.2 *Sámi Language Studies in the Modern World – by Ilona Kivinen*

The tradition of language research among the Sápmi reaches far back in time, at least a few centuries. Language documentation has played a crucial role in Sámi language studies, and it has also been closely connected to language history, etymology and the studies of Finnish and other languages that are related to Sámi languages. There has also been a long history of comparing Sámi with other languages and of proving its relation to Uralic languages. Also, many linguists, such as Just Knud Qvigstad, were interested in the Sámi languages as disappearing languages that needed to be documented. Despite the ideas of different scholars, the collected materials have helped in revitalizing the languages.

Today, documentary linguistics aims to collect and save ethically and technically sustainable materials on languages in the world (Himmelmann 1998, 2006). It is supposed to serve both research and the language communities in their aims to maintain and develop their languages (Austin & Sallabank 2018; Jalava & Sandman 2020).

My interest lies in examining changes in Sámi languages, and the research method involves documenting the language spoken by native speakers, in addition to using archive material. In the field, I asked Sámi speakers to talk to each other while I was recording the conversation both with video and audio equipment. I admitted both native and second-language speakers to my research. This differs from many earlier studies, in which the scholars decided

who spoke language well enough to participate the study.⁵ There were given topics, but the speakers were free to change the topics and speak about whatever they preferred as the focus of the study was in the morphosyntactic structure of the language, not the topics of the conversations. The speakers knew that I can speak their language, so they knew I understood their conversations. In modern research I see it important that the scholar knows the language enough to converse with the consultants.

The research itself concerns the language and is connected with the long tradition of language research. The methodological issues in my field trip concern questions about how to collect material ethically, where to archive collected material, and how my research may serve the language communities. These questions I solved by interacting with the Sámi. I asked how the language consultants wanted to get information on the study. Mostly they wanted to know about my research directly.

I presented my work in conferences to Sámi scholars who were interested in my work. I was wondering how useful my studies were for them, but I got positive feedback. I also noticed that the Sámi were especially interested in the language spoken in the nineteenth century. Therefore, I decided to concentrate on that language more than I had planned before the presentation.

6 Challenging Power Structures by Applying Participatory Photography – by Attila Paksi

While I was walking in one of the villages with my research assistant, a somewhat intoxicated Khwe man in his 50s approached me yelling in Afrikaans and Khwedam:

What are you giving to me? What are you giving to my family? You are here, asking questions, and going back to your country to become rich. You never gave anything to us. (Field notes, 20/10/2016)

At that time, I had already known this person for many months, visited his household several times and shared food, and provided transport for him. After my initial surprise, I realized that his aggressive verbal attack was more of an expression of accumulated past sorrows with researchers and development agents. The colonial legacy of conducting research with Indigenous peoples is impossible to neglect in the field. Smith (1999) argues that the research process creates a positional superiority of the researcher which objectifies Others. Max (2005) urges researchers working with Indigenous peoples to understand the

history and presence of colonization in a self-reflective manner concerning power and privilege with the aim of becoming allies in collaborative research projects. However, the entrenched positional superiority of a researcher exists not only in academic circles but also in the mind of Indigenous peoples, which makes it even more challenging to form a legitimate and meaningful alliance.

The verbal attack also signalled the desire of the community members to organize my research along the lines of local norms and involve the whole community in a way that every household could benefit. Smith (1999, 50) argues that local communities have the task to determine priorities, to bring the locally chosen issues to the centre, and to discuss them within their community. However, this process implies a hierarchy among the local individuals: one person stepping forward from the community to propose a meeting, setting an agenda and leading a discussion. The person who proposes such a meeting puts himself under enormous social pressure from local peers as San people mostly choose opportunities that will not make them stand out from the rest of their communities (see e.g. Ninkova 2017, 219). The person might get ridiculed and asked: do you think you are special? I often found that development agents and ministry personnel working with the Khwe became frustrated with the lack of active participation, as illustrated by the following quote of a Namibian NGO worker:

I am tired of the Khwe. We organized meetings, training and provided opportunities, but when the time comes to stand up for their own rights and mobilize themselves, nobody does anything. (Interview transcript, 11/12/2017)

While the exact reasons for the lack of the Khwe's self-mobilization are complex, the hunter-gatherer egalitarian social relationships do form an essential part of this phenomenon.

At the beginning of the 15 months fieldwork, I was generally perceived by the Khwe as a white outsider, with abundant resources, staying only temporarily in the villages. I was frequently asked to give money, food or provide car transport. As one of the young adolescent Khwe told me, laughing after I denied his request to give him 10 Namibian dollars:

For you, it is easy. You can say no. (Field notes, 9/3/2017)

He was right. I had the power and privilege to answer yes or no to any request of the communities. After the initial struggles, certain rules were set and by following the principle of critical immersion, I participated actively in

the villagers' daily lives. I started learning the local Khwedam language, drank the same borehole water and took part in various activities ranging from wild food collections to community meetings. However, critical immersion has to go further than plain participation. It is a process of interaction, by which respect is communicated, and acceptance is achieved (Groh 2018). The local's perceptions about me as an outsider changed notably over time. Towards the end of my fieldwork, a community meeting was organized by one of the government offices in a Khwe village. I was eager to participate; therefore, I approached the government officers to allow me to sit at the meeting. I was rejected as they said only community members are invited. When I shared this with the Khwe representatives, they replied:

What are they talking about? You are living with us for a long time. You are a member of our community, so just come and sit with us. (Field notes, 2/2/2018)

Apart from sharing the daily life of the Khwe, and learning about the local power relations, the conscious choice of research methods also contributed to challenging the long-established unequal power structures. One of the methods I have applied during my fieldwork is Photovoice. Photovoice is a visual Participatory Action Research (PAR) method where participants identify, capture and reflect on specific topics within their own community through photography. The method involves the training of the participants, taking photos, individual interviews and group discussions, and deciding on the action to initiate change. PAR is often quoted as an approach to overcoming power imbalances between researchers and research participants by creating conditions that foster empowerment (Pant 2014). Photovoice is designed to increase the individual's and the community's access to power (Wang & Burris 1997). In addition, further advantages are also highlighted, such as seeing the world through the community members' eyes and engaged participation. These resonate well with the principles formulated by Snow and colleagues (2016). However, Castleden and Garvin (2008) pointed out, when working with Indigenous partners, that the researcher should consider modifying the Photovoice method according to the local values, social relations and practices. In their work with the Huu-ay-aht First Nation tribe in Canada, they applied an iterative process of Photovoice to mimic the traditionally iterative way of community dialogues.

Certain aspects of the Photovoice method were modified according to Khwe San cultural values and practices. In the process of the nomination and selection of participants, I aimed to take into account egalitarian social

relations and tried to engage the whole community. I observed during my stay that the commonly used selection processes by development agents caused social disruption. When the headman nominated participants, he selected his closest kin only. If the community decided about the participants in a meeting, they randomly selected people present at that time. Development agents tended to choose participants with higher grades of education or experienced knowledge holders. Each of the selection methods is likely to cause anger and jealousy between community members as some households would be over-represented, while others are left out. After careful consideration, the ten selected participants represented ten different households that were not related to each other; the group consisted of five men and five women; participants represented a diverse educational and socio-economic background, and there was one representative of the village headman's family. Even though participation was voluntary, and the selection process followed cultural protocols, the community members still did not gain full control over the participatory photography method. I had learned that all previous community projects had failed when development agents left the responsibility of selecting participants and organizing the resources to the Khwe community members. Therefore, the approach I applied was to facilitate the Photovoice project for its whole duration and make joint decisions with the community members by actively listening to everyone's voice. Using the Photovoice method, the participants set the basic rules, decided the time frame, and the conditions and procedures of sharing the photos. Moreover, at the end of the project, the photographers – together with the broader community – decided about future actions related to the photos and the stories that they had captured.

Another power imbalance surfaced over the course of the fieldwork. The Khwe community members expressed several times that their survival and overall livelihood depended on the Namibian Government's policies and decisions. They looked dejected and voiced their feelings about being marginalized and powerless. In one of the Photovoice projects, the topic of "*hunger in our community*" was chosen, as the Khwe people wanted to present their struggles to government officials, who regularly dismiss complaints about food insecurity. The photographers captured many aspects of food availability, accessibility and affordability in their villages, and shared their photos and stories at a larger community meeting. Having received the results of the Photovoice, community members felt they had a crucial role to play in initiating positive social change by sharing the photos and stories with government officials. Therefore, the community decided to create and print a formal report with the most representative photos and stories to hand them over to local decision-makers personally.

The Photovoice method was repeated in five villages, involving a total of 41 Khwe San participants, focusing on a variety of themes (hunger, well-being, development, and traditional knowledge) based on mutually agreed terms. While the hunger project resulted in a printed report targeting government officials, in the other projects, the participants created posters to showcase them at community meetings and exhibit them at local schools. Furthermore, it was discussed with the participants that a photo exhibition would be organized in the future, with an even wider (international) reach to raise awareness about their present situation. The Photovoice process and its results certainly contributed to empower local community members to act. However, to reach the desired positive social changes, mutually respectful relationships need to be developed not only with researchers but also between the Khwe people and local, regional and national decision-makers.

7 Power Relations in Language Documentation and in Academia – by Ilona Kivinen

7.1 *Language Documentation: Who Has the Power? What about Trust?*

The Sámi are one of the most studied Indigenous peoples in the world (Lehtola 2015a, 22), and before the Dálvadas project (the official name was “*The collecting project of Sámi folklore*”) in the 1960s, they were only objects of study. In the Dálvadas project, organized by the University of Turku, Finland, the Sámi themselves took part in the research and, for example, conducted the interviews themselves, although the project was led by non-Sámi scholars. The interests in studying Sámi came from outside, and the research often served political agendas. In the 18th and 19th centuries Sámi was taught to priests in order to convert the Sámi people to Christianity. Thus, also the first literary material written in Sámi was mostly religious.

I have discussed my background earlier in this chapter, and regardless of my roots, I see myself as an outsider in a language community. Thus, I carry the burden of a former tradition in which the language material was recorded and then taken away. The language consultants hardly ever knew where the extracted material was stored and how it was used. The problem between Indigenous peoples and scholars was, and still is, trust. For example, Lagercrantz (1950, 159), a linguist who actively argued on behalf of revitalizing the Sámi languages, had difficulty in gaining the trust of the Sámi people. The scepticism concerning the agenda of the scholars can still be heard in such comments as: “The scholar wants only to benefit his/her career with this

research".⁶ Thus, I had to be careful not to make the consultants feel as if they were mere objects but were crucial participants in the study, because in the end, the speakers had the deciding power. If they volunteer for the work, there will be material for research. If they do not, there will be no new materials, and researchers will be confined to work with archives. In order to get consultants, the scholar has to be open about the study (s)he makes, and avoid giving a feeling that (s)he is in power to extract material from the native speaker.

Trust means friendship, and over time there have been friendships between scholars and consultants. I thought that by knowing people and speaking the language, it would be rather easy to get consultants. I did get a total of eight conversations recorded, but it was more difficult than I thought, and I did not get as many conversations as I wanted. I felt uneasy about asking people if they could come and act as consultants for me, which made the task even more difficult. However, I did benefit from friendships, because it is easier to ask a friend to participate than a stranger.

Documentary linguistics today is based on the assumption that language is part of a speaker's physical, psychological, social and cultural environment (Jalava & Sandman 2020). Documentary linguistics, and linguistic research more widely, should serve the language communities in their efforts to revitalize their languages. The communities should have the power to decide how to use the materials collected in language documentation. The most appropriate archive for saving the collected Sámi material is the Sámi Kulturarkiiva (Saami Culture Archive), which is at the University of Oulu. The archive is connected with the Giellagas Institute, which is primarily responsible for Sámi higher education in Finland, and the archive material is used in education. One of the archive's aims is to offer material for revitalizing and strengthening the Sámi traditions, language and culture, and to connect the present Sámi with their ancestors.⁷ It also receives archive material from other institutes in order to be the one place where all Sámi material is collected, and thus make the archive material accessible.

7.2 *The Power Relations in Academia and the "New Linguistics"*

The question of power relations in academia is twofold. First, it concerns the position of Indigenous languages in the more and more monolingual English academia, in which even national languages have been marginalized in research. Second, it concerns the question of who has the right to carry out Indigenous research.

English has expanded to all areas in academia in the name of internationality. Alongside of Indigenous and minority languages, national languages also

struggle in modern academic surroundings, in which points are given by the publication of work in English. This development also hinders the terminological work in research and keeps information from the communities it is supposed to benefit. Something is always lost in translation, and cultural differences are particularly difficult to translate (see Kovach 2009). Also, I see it as problematic that in a large variety of studies, terminology is translated from English to other languages instead of looking for more suitable terms in their own languages.

Linguists are, or should be, in the front line to resist the development of monolingual academia. Florey (2008) uses the term the “new linguistics”, in which linguists not only document languages but also actively participate in the revitalization and preservation of the languages they study. This can also be seen as giving back to the community. I have had the opportunity to learn the language, and I am obliged to work actively to preserve the language and develop its use in new domains such as academia. Multilingualism and multiculturalism should be brought into academia in order to support multiculturalism in the world, both inside and outside the academia. The language activism among scholars is not new. In the 1920s Lagercrantz was already actively participating in the work to revitalize and develop the position of Sámi in society (Lagercrantz 1950, 120).

The Sámi have developed the use of Sámi languages at an academic level by establishing their own Sámi academia. For example, North Sámi is the main language of Sámi allaskuvla, The Sámi University of Applied Sciences.

It is possible to use Sámi languages in certain symposiums and conferences. The oldest academic symposium in Sámi is probably the *Sámi giela ja girjjálašvuoda symposia* – The symposium for Sámi language and literature, which has been organized biennially since 1993.

There are also two academic journals that publish in Sámi. One, *Sámi dieddalaš áigečala* has been published since the 1990s. The second one, *Dutkansearvvi dieddalaš áigečala* has been published since 2018. Both publish articles on Sámi and Indigenous issues. Both are peer-reviewed journals, which means that the reviewers are at least capable of reading in Sámi. It is still good to keep in mind that academic Sámi, just like other languages at an academic level, is not always comprehended by average speakers. Thus, it is crucial to inform readers about research by using other channels than the scientific publishing ones.

Concerning the question of who can carry out Indigenous study, the field of Sámi studies is politicized (Lukin 2014, 2015). Now much of the research is also done by Sámi themselves, and some tend to think that only Sámi can carry out Sámi research (Mustonen 2012, 261). However, there are also views that state

that the scholar's ethnicity does not make him/her a better scholar in any subject (A. Aikio 2006, 379).

Non-Indigenous scholars have to be careful and listen carefully to the Sámi people and communities. However, it is also essential to avoid polarizing Indigeneity and non-Indigeneity; instead both groups should work closely together. An example of togetherness in Sámi linguistics has been the conference series Sámi linguistic symposium (SAALS), which gathers together both Sámi and non-Sámi scholars to exchange ideas and trends in Sámi linguistics. Participants may give their presentations in English or any Sámi language. This is an example of active work in preserving and developing the language at the academic level, and in this matter the Sámi language community may be an example to other Indigenous language communities by showing that it is possible to bring the language to an academic level.

8 Addressing Sharing and Reciprocity among the Khwe San – by Attila Paksi

The Khwe man in his 50s who yelled at me and complained about the lack of his personal benefits highlighted different conceptualizations of giving and sharing. In many research settings, giving back means the dissemination of the study results with the intention that the research contributes to the local people's future well-being. However, as the researcher eventually leaves the Indigenous community, the locals are eager to receive tangible benefits while the researcher is among them. *The Journal of Research Practice* dedicated a special issue to the topic of "Giving Back in Field Research", where the authors showcased several ways of giving back to the community, including monetary compensation, sharing food, providing jobs and skilled training, car rides and organizing community festivals, among other things (Gupta & Kelly 2014). Furthermore, the authors also highlighted their own struggles to overcome power differences, choose the most appropriate methods, and create a reciprocal relationship.

Kovach (2009) argues that the concept of giving back means to maintain a relationship throughout the entire research process. Too often in the past, the Khwe people received false promises, therefore gaining their trust and building a reciprocal relationship seemed difficult. When I promised at the end of my first five months of fieldwork that I am coming back again soon, every single Khwe person laughed at me in disbelief. They have heard these kinds of promises too many times already. My arrival for the second five months increased the level of trust and strengthened my relationship with the locals, which has

grown even stronger after my periodical but still continuous interaction with the people. One of the many ways of interacting with the Khwe was the cultural process of sharing. Demand sharing in an immediate-return hunter-gatherer society has a long tradition (Peterson 1993; Woodburn 1982), which carries over to the present day. Therefore, providing car rides, transporting water and agricultural products, sharing food and water, giving away clothes, stationery and books are all part of the cultural process of sharing which were taken for granted during my fieldwork. It is one of the primary practices to maintain egalitarian social relations and address power differences within the community.

Barnard (2004) notes that sharing and reciprocity are partly strategies for social well-being and partly strategies for material well-being, while Widlok (2013) argues for differentiating sharing from reciprocity. As the sharing of the researcher's material resources is implicitly embedded into the Khwe cultural sphere, giving back and reciprocity could mainly be addressed in the non-material realm. Gupta and Kelly (2014) provided some examples like the organization of training and skill development or assistance in writing grant proposals. Another common theme among marginalized communities is simply to spend time with the locals and listen to their needs, complaints, ideas and proposed solutions and if possible, forward those to the relevant decision-makers. These activities might seem unrelated to the scientific work and categorized as advocacy – as stated in relation to the principle of methodological flexibility by Snow and colleagues (2016) – but they are crucial building blocks of reciprocity.

The choice of research methods could weaken or strengthen reciprocal relationships. The Photovoice method enables researchers to act as trainers and share their skills and knowledge on communication and photography in the beginning. During the project, however, the participants became the experts while explaining local phenomenon based on their photos to the researcher or each other. Moreover, the researcher might participate as a facilitator during Photovoice group discussions and act as an advocate by connecting community members and decision-makers. Ultimately, the advocacy remains with the local community members. This multi-layered relationship between the researcher and the community members forms an integral part of reciprocity.

Photovoice, as a research method, provided crucial data for my studies, at the same time, it also strengthened my relationships with the local community. One of the participants shared his satisfaction with the Photovoice project:

I am glad you came to us. Nobody came to our village before to teach us something. (Field notes, 12/11/2016)

The locals perceived participatory photography not as a research method, but primarily as a useful set of skills that could provide benefits for the community. The Khwe photographers mastered a new tool – the camera – and connected it with the already familiar method of storytelling to express themselves in a potentially more impactful way, showing their ability to be their own advocates in the future. Working with self-taken photographs, the participants could showcase – and capture with a camera – their detailed knowledge of the local flora and fauna, and could integrate their social and cultural values in ways that are well-aligned with the Khwe’s everyday life.

9 Giving Back in the Sámi and Linguistic Context – by Ilona Kivinen

“Sometimes giving back starts with the ability of looking at another human being and giving with no agenda other than to say thank you” (Finney 2014, 4). Giving back to the community is rather a new idea, although already earlier scholars did get involved in daily chores while living among the people and sent their publications back to the communities (Enges & Mahlamäki 2018; Lagercrantz 1950). However, no other steps were taken to give back the research findings.

In recent years the repatriation of physical materials, such as bones and museum collections, have been returned to the Sámi areas and Sámi museums.⁸ Such work has started the revitalization of old cultural artefacts, such as *ládjogahpir*, a Sámi woman’s hat with a horn, which disappeared from use in the 19th century (Harlin & Pieski 2020). Also, the earlier mentioned Dálvadas project was resurrected in the spirit of repatriation. In 2018 scholars went to the village of Dálvadas in Ohcejohka (Utsjoki) and held a gathering with local people to inform them about the collected material. The scholars and villagers gave presentations and held an exhibition of the photos taken during the research project (Enges & Mahlamäki 2018).

What about linguistic material and research? How can one give back in the linguistic context? Many chrestomathies made of Sámi languages were written for an academic audience rather than for language learning purposes at a basic level, or being useful for the language speakers themselves. Modern research ethics require that the material has to be given back to the community in a form that locals can use it. This means that there should not just be academic studies, but also material for the language community, such as grammars and dictionaries (Jalava & Sandman 2020). However, funding is rarely available for both purposes. This part should be better understood by funding institutions in order to benefit the language communities better.

Giving back also means openness to possibilities to make use of the research in different contexts. I felt that I was conducting my research out of purely academic interest. However, I was also hoping to contribute to the description of North Sámi adjectives in future grammars, which is an essential part of the language documentation process. At an early stage of the study, a Sámi teacher (a Sámi herself) told me how happy she was with my research focus, as she hoped that it would make the teaching of adjectives easier for her. This is one example of the way in which my research might be of some use.

Linguists can, and even should, be involved in the revitalization work of minority and Indigenous languages in the spirit of the new linguistics (Florey 2008, 124). As a linguist I am grateful for learning the Sámi language and giving back means active participation in revitalizing and developing the language so that it is preserved for later generations. For my own part, I have given lectures and presentations, and written articles in Sámi, thus actively working for the use of Sámi on an academic level.

I also wanted to say thank you to the people participating in my study. As it is traditional, in the field I offered the participants something to eat and drink to thank them for participating in my study. I thanked them in the presentation I held in Sámi at a conference in 2018, even though the examples from the collected materials shown were anonymised, and focused on the language, not on the content. I thanked those who had participated in my study in person, but I also thanked those, living and dead, who had told their stories to be stored in the archives that I am using to study the language. I will also send information on my research to any language consultants who would like to know more about my work. However, the academic level does not always benefit the community. Sometimes also the availability of academic publications for everyday people is limited. Both Sámi journals, however, are available on the Internet. Though, the language in an academic publication includes vocabulary that may not be known to common speakers. Also, illiteracy in written Sámi is still a fact (Kemi 2009, 67–68), as the modern orthography for North Sámi was only accepted as late as in 1979 (S. Aikio 1987, 474). In this context, I feel that it is not enough for me to just write in academic publications. Also, I am planning to give an interview in Sámi when I have something to tell about my studies. We have already talked about this possibility with a Sámi journalist who knows of my topic.

10 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have presented two sets of principles related to working together with Indigenous peoples in a research context. We have reflected on

our own fieldwork experiences working with the Sámi and the Khwe San people and examined how these principles are taken into account in our studies. Through our methodological choices, we illustrated how we approached power relations, relationships and reciprocity.

Relationships were found to be of crucial importance in our research (see also Chapters 2, 3, 5 & 9). The multi-layered, complex interactions started with a thorough standpoint clarification by reflecting on and connecting to ourselves. Gaining trust and acceptance through honesty and mutuality from the Indigenous community members represented another layer of relationships. Our connection to the research topic, to our role and obligations in the Indigenous community and to the specific research methods also formed our relationships. The power relations between the researcher, the Indigenous community members, stakeholders and decision-makers, as well as between the wider academia and language communities poses a constant challenge to reciprocal relationships and plays an important role in advocating for positive social change.

Our methodological choices might be shaped by our disciplinary background, but they were highly influenced by the local settings. Adopting Indigenous approaches or adjusting long-established methods when producing research – in a collective way of listening to the voices of the Indigenous communities – could be transformative. In academic circles the transformation could take the form of changing research practices and developing reciprocal relationships, whereas in Indigenous communities, benefits can be received both during and after the research. The applied Photovoice method among the Khwe San provided a practical case study on the challenges and opportunities of methodological choices when working with Indigenous people. The presented fieldwork methods and considerations in Sámi language research illustrate the respect and flexibility that should serve not only the academia but also the language community. The modernization of Sámi languages can be seen as a successful collaboration between academia and language speakers, and as an example of language activism on the academic level. Irrespective of which specific method is chosen to work with, we need to acknowledge the importance of giving back throughout the entirety of the research process.

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Notes

- 1 The World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) is a membership-based organization focusing on recognizing and reaffirming the educational rights of all Indigenous Peoples.
- 2 Oral information by Reetta Toivanen (2018).
- 3 Sámediggi: <https://www.samediggi.fi/saamelaiset-info/> [20 January 2019].
- 4 Sámediggi: <https://www.samediggi.fi/saamelaiset-info/> [20 January 2019].
- 5 See e.g. Ravila (1931, 62–63).
- 6 Blogtext by Helga West: <https://helgawest.com/2018/11/09/mitas-me-vasyneet-saamelaiset-maailman-tutkituin-kansa/> [20 January 2019].
- 7 Sámi Culture Archive, research ethics: <https://www.oulu.fi/giellagasinstitut/node/18760#Archival%20Research>
- 8 See e.g. Yle news on returning of Sámi collection from Tampere to Sámi museum Siida: https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/sapmi/siidassa_yleiso_paasee_viimein_nakemaan_yli_100_vuotta_tampereella_lojuneita_saamelaisesineita/7991022

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